







Rain

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Archives

Clatsop Community College's Annual Literary Magazine 2001 Rain is an annual production of the students at Clatsop Community College, Astoria, Oregon. Funding comes from Clatsop Community College and by the support of generous patrons.

All submissions were voted for acceptance by members of the staff.

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Cover printing and binding: Multnomah Printing, Inc., 1339 S.E. 8th Ave., Portland, Oregon (503) 234-4048. Text copied by Ann Gyde of CCC.

Mail submissions for next year's issue to Dr. Julie Brown, Clatsop Community College, Astoria, Oregon 97103 between October 1 and January 10. No more than 10 pages prose or 5 poems. Please include SASE for return, and include name, address, and phone number on all entries. No electronic submissions, please.

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Contents

Astoria Rain Reflection	1
Patrick Overton	
The Columbia	2
Patricia McInroy	
New Year's Morning	3
Patricia Stanton	71
Needles	5
Joe Mansfield	
Blues	6
Robert Michael Pyle	
Divertimento	7
Robert Brown	
Return to Earth	9
Brian F. Harrison	
Ponte Vecchio	10
Anusuya Silga	
The Dessert	11
Mary Lou Newell	
The Forest	12
Luke Wirkkala	
Here, As There	13
Debra Brimacombe	
Mushroom Morning	14
Claudia Harper	
The River Banks	16
Debra Brimacombe	
River Bank	17
Robert Brown	
Rivermoon	18
Diane Matthews	10
Daymoon	19
Diane Matthews	17
Under the New Moon	20
Brian F Harrison	20
Illumination	21
Luke Wirkkala	21
Fertile One	22
Christy Phillips-Matlock	22
Salmon	23
James Dott	23
DWITES DULL	

Chasing Rainbows	24
Bill Graffius	
My Kind of Haiku, Too Dawn Dunham Parker	26
	26
Hush: Blackberry Vines	20
Estelle Seeley	27
Log Truck in Blackberries	27
Estelle Seeley	20
I Am Wind	28
Lynn Potter	20
Racing the Mist	29
James Ricketts	
A Salt Air Harvest	31
Virgil Bowman	
In The Path Of The Tsunami	32
Florence Sage	
Undertow	34
Donna K Wright	
The Journey	36
Sue Falkner Wood	
Crone	38
Imara A Jabari	
Pajama Party For One	40
Carol L Little	
Red	41
Jeanette Thorpe	
Memoir of She	42
Jené Ricketts	
Sleepers Awake!	43
Robert Brown	
Outside Go Want	44
Luc Fenix	
White Walls	48
Jené Ricketts	
Pressed For Time	49
Janet Willener	
Umpire	50
James Ricketts	
Chances	51
Mark Mizell	
Quiet	52
Nada Harrison	

Hi Mommy	53
Janet Willener	
Learning to Play Violin at 45	54
Karen Braucher	
Barbara	55
Nada Harrison	-/
All the Way Home	56
Florence Sage	
Lesbianism and Acts of God V.A. Russell	57
Sky's Passion	60
Anusuya Silga	
The Scent of Eucalyptus	62
Leslie Pugmire	
Frozen	65
Christy Phillips-Matlock	
Suicide	66
Joanna Saari	
Elegy For My Father	67
Imara A Jabari	
Be Strong	69
Sonja Engebretson	
Someday	84
Jan Bono	
Stopping by Your Room to Get a Book Rae Marie Zimmerling	85
Saudi Arabian Letters	87
Karen Braucher	
Where I Am	90
Jennifer Binkley	
Glass Heart	91
David Campiche	
Tide Pool	93
Ray Propst	
Cold Season Sarcasm	94
Raven Russell	
Under the Apple Tree	.95
Josie Ricketts	
Sunset Theories	96
Caitlin Harris	

Singer's Manifesto	97
Kelsey Mousley	
I Had a Dream	98
Kristina Kabanuk	
The Heron	99
Margit Bowler	
Wishful Thinking	100
Meghan Standridge	

Astoria Rain Reflection For Edith Miller — Easter, 2000

There is a place where river meets the sea — Magnificent a sight, a source of awe. A throwback to what currents used to be, it is the river Clark and Lewis saw.

Yet inhospitable this place can seem. The winter-dark, the cold can cause disdain, create discomfort that is so extreme we fail to see the gift that comes from rain.

Cathedral arches penetrate the sky, ascend, renew a promise few recall, a second covenant to sanctify — a grace revealed that reconciles all.

While sunbreak light ignites the colored mist, there must be rain for rainbows to exist.

Patrick Overton

The Columbia

The Columbia flowed— mighty waters, we're told,
Issued steadily down to the sea
Red cedar canoes joined with rainforest hues
Along riverside ports of entry.

Some strangers were here, and with purposes clear,
They took view of the water and land—
Surveying, they came, and their journals remain
More than handwriting written in sand.

Time has flowed on since then— much has changed for the men
Who took note of the writings of Clark
Some precious things died— different cultures preside
And now everyone leaves a new mark.

No more frolicsome waves— tossing billows and sprays
Along the sand row of the bar—
But a channel dug deep— through restriction and steep
Gives safe entry to ships from afar.

Patricia McInroy

New Year's Morning

"And peace can come drop by drop, perhaps at night when we don't know anything."

-Baltics, Thomas Transtromer

The moon fades in a salt sky so huge I can't see the offing, that nuance that separates sky from an ocean which rumbled all night its requiem of farewells, a music commemorating itself in garland upon garland of gray lines.

The winter Pacific—
an imagined Baltic
with no islands.
"There are stark winter days
when the sea has links..."

today a luster to it, coupled with a small billow milk-like nearly innocent.

Worlds away, in Somalia, Kosovo, Detroit, the old year begged or blasted its last hours ago.

A helix of smoke not disconnected from the remains of a driftwood fire---

a pyre resolutely flaring and falling in on itself---

speaking what it hasn't yet finished saying before the unoccupied, skeletal chair.

The chair a relic itself, a minimalist construction of greenish plastic and metal of a design that was bones to begin with now rusted, washed up (renounced even by the ocean), resurrected

as a post from which to watch the night,

feet sunk in the inexhaustible sand.

An island

under a moon clouded over.

How did the sitter decide which to read—the flame, the sky, or the ocean?

A solitary figure seated in front of the edge of the world, free of before and after, inclined toward a fire

so often speaking in code to a water it can't love nor ever win over

For days the creosote smell of smoke will carry

Unseen ships ghost along the horizon.

At the river's entrance

the bar pilot is pulled from his recurring dream of missing a train that never arrives.

Malaysia's out there, somewhere, a blueprint of the unknown.

It's almost daylight when the crab boats churn across the bar and you see the crabbers set their pots, their lights stringing over the waves one long, unfinished sentence.

Patricia Staton

Needles



Joe Mansfield

Blues

In the summer of '76, blue wings shone like Superman's hair by the pool for Lincoln's monument: red-spotted purple, basking on the hot marble rim.

In the spring of '96, shimmering wings again shot blue beside the same reflecting pond: blue jays tussling over Kleenex for their nest in a pale green elm.

Iridescent blues, beamed from butterfly to bird across the decades, across the water with its picture of a penny's flip side struck in white.

And here's what's different in twenty year's time: beyond the placid pool has grown a wall, long, black, and graven with names of fifty thousand dead.

Robert Michael Pyle

Divertimento

Sipping cabernet from cut-crystal glass, all I know, costumed and ablaze in festive greens, purples, and yellows, shifts and swirls through the cloudy, tobacco haze of my thoughts. Mardi Gras, another

academic year whisking past, I watch myself from beyond my body, always the critic, even now behind my dime store mask, not enough wine yet, never quite enough: I watch my wife dance, twirling in her full

white dress, arms held skyward and baby's breath woven into her locks. Like a country wench tipsy with mead, she breezes round and round a phantom Maypole. Burdened by my domino, I pass judgment: stern sentences, stolidly

upon myself. Others pass--a handful of fools, a few clowns, a black widow in a low-cut dress, Christopher Columbus ready to storm the New World, a Cardinal and a Venus, a black-eyed convict dragging ball and chain, siamese twins--lovers

bound together at ankle, shoulder, and hip. I stand guard, pour drinks, make idle chat with a white-haired emeritus who downs Glenfiddich after Glenfiddich--the pace of our drinking dictates the rhythm of swaying

speech. Looking back, he didn't publish much: kids, teaching, parties, Europe every other summer took their cut. He can't complain: he winters in Florida then returns north for Chaucer each spring. 76, spry, a bit too steady

with Scotch, he recites a ritual passage

from the "Miller's Tale" in Middle English--a feat he performed so theatrically and warm I knew I could never match. I smile and clap and pour him, deservedly, another drink.

Robert Brown

Return to Earth

Chilean rain falls on the ugly head of the old burro. Touching down on the comic erect ears, flowing past the large, empty eyes, down the long face with its ropy veins and flaring nostrils, the runoff gathers into one large drop hanging suspended from the lower lip, resisting the final fall, growing, hesitating, unable to turn back or throw itself onto the sandy street. It waits shivering with the breathing of the beast, until at last its time has come to return to earth.

Brian F. Harrison

Ponte Vecchio

The autumn sky hangs full pink a ripe fruit split wide open dripping golden juice into the Arno bittersweet and sticky young lovers sigh on Ponte Vecchio Lwatch their eager arms caress rhythm of heartbeat and hormones eyes lips hands create a fortress where virgin hearts remain cloistered from the crowd the soft scent of their desire mingles with ghosts of perfumed courtiers draped in crimson velvet discrete noblewomen and tired sweaty peasants

at sunset tourists congregate clutching cameras and guidebooks white Adidas glowing in the dusk among all that fine black Italian leather polished to perfection

we are drawn here thirsty our parched hearts longing for a sip of sky golden and bittersweet our lives float slowly past us in the water reflections of Dante drowned soldiers and countless unconsummated lovers the tireless Arno swallows it all she flows careless beneath the bridge chanting beauty and destruction as stars flick on one by one like so many ancient memories.

Anusuya Silga

The Desert

In this great desert with a few moments of daylight, waiting for the stars to appear, thinking how many times before she has drawn me here. My love of the desert brings me back to see colors of beige, pink mauve and reds beneath a turquoise sky. Coyote's blanched bones lay bare on the

desert sand under the yucca that grows tall with dense clusters of white flowers.

How did you happen to die here under this plant on the desert... my Coyote friend? Did she call you here, too? Being here is my Milky Way, a path, a tease, this woman temptress...the desert.

Mary Lou Newell

The Forest

Dawn,
Mist in the fir trees,
Only the birds are awake.
Cold, laced up leather steel
Imprints the rich brown soil.
The solitude disturbed by the roar of the engine
Belching out diesel smoke as it comes to life
Once more.
Apathy is her beauty.

Luke Wirkkala

Here, As There

Like footsteps blundering through the forest the last leaves fall through the branches of the maples. The frost this morning made them heavy, and they land with the weight of a hoof or heel while the blue sky etches its place in the canopy — a warning to winter. At every step I recall the sand clinging to my back, not wanting to be brushed anywhere, the white foam roaming around my toes, and a lick of salt in the water dripping from my hair.

Debra Brimacombe

Mushroom Morning

At dawn in the woods dark fur-lined columns rise over flesh-red rhododendron and rusty madrone splay fingerbranches over longfallen giants shrouded in splotches of yellowcrusted sponges Mushrooms spread fanlike round encrusting them as they lay

Nearby thick swords of fern thrust and parry in morning winds, their spores blow and sow in the thick mulch of time-discarded leaf feeding smoothwhite mottled umbrellas Mushrooms wake from the wet earth stretch and yawn their wide gray undergills Ready for more growing more feeding on earth's decay

Below the tree of life cedar inside the still-shaded stump a bruisepurple torch shines in erection warning violence, writhing assured death Mushrooms reflect a memory of primordial origin when other giants reptilian fell to time until reborn in oozing richness

Under the deep thickness of soil slip thousands of threads sewing a net of roots minuscule transparent tightening the earth to solidity birthing dirt and seeds and living Mushrooms tell the story everlasting --like soil turned over and over-of life and death power and prey

Claudia Harper

The River Banks

I've watched fishermen stand on the riverbank side-by-side like posts in a fence and stare at their lines, the floats that drift and bob and drown in the steely flashes of sunlight, swearing at the gnats that enter their mouths when the wind slows, keen to the tug on their lines like stars that wait for the strain of night

I watched one fisherman bear the shove of the current against the heels of his high boots where the river bends and surges, rippling into a pool, his arms high, swinging his pole and playing the line, imitating the flight of flies, the way they skim the surface and dart or roam, lured toward a reflection

Today I saw a boy force a hook through a worm. He grimaced and bit his tongue then he pulled the line back to cast and I could hear the reel spin.

Debra Brimaco

River Bank



Robert Brown

Rivermoon

The silver moon balloon pulls a tattered thread of fog in the night-black sky

Come moon,
tug the string of existence,
sail the still, cold earth.
Feel the moon-wind lift
of perfect flight
as your velvet shadow
Glides the land of water, rock, and trees.

The fan of your glittering bridal-train iridesces river skin
As you tread the isle of the Columbia on your way to wed the farside of morning.

Diane Matthews

Daymoon

Poor day moon pale lover of the sun. She faces earth, and smiles for those who need to know the brightest burns what cannot be seen.

Pale mistress of night she slips across the gray dawn to the High-lord, Day gold-hot on his sky throne; Gaining a silver cool reflection of the life she cannot live.

Simply kindled, seldom-sojourner of day, her beauty's quiet spectacle measures a comma to the sun's sentence.
While a chilled "yes" warms not the ones who see without looking.

Diane Matthews

Under the New Moon

I remember dancing Under the new moon, In the sounds of a forest night. As you held me close, guitars And flutes and slowly... Drums arrived in a crescendo, A swirling vortex That forced us into frenzied Whirling to maintain tempo, A state of absorption That left no room for melancholy, Diminishing as the artists Filed back into the woods, Echoes of their wondrous voice Sharing a dimension of life Where things become Clear, and answers to Our questions arrive With the return Of the forest night.

Brian F. Harrison

Illumination

Silver light,
Dancing with distant memories
On the rippled surface of the dark blue water.
Gentle waves lapping at the shore whisper it,
Maybe it was never meant to be.
I listen,
And try to hear.

Luke Wirkkala

Fertile One

Thick, rich, heavy, woven blankets of yellow, green and dark brown, piled one upon the other are thrown carefully upon the beds by strong, rough, loving hands protecting the promising seeds of her love and labor from the chill of the air. She gently tucks earth under earth, tidying the stray vines and leaves, gathering up paraphernalia left out. Latching the weathered wooden gate, she bids goodnight, prepared for the long, dark, bitter winter all alone under golden moonlight.

Christy Phillips-Matlock

Salmon

For dinner on my mother's birthday my father bought salmon, fresh Pacific Chinook, meat the color of sunsets over the ocean in Oregon, where we spent summers in a cabin above a beach cupped between two sandstone headlands. We had picnics there among salt-bleached logs, tossed up by winter storms. Late in the afternoon, my father would dig a pit, line it with stones, build a fire, let it burn down to coals, lay on seaweed, then a bright salmon, just caught, its silver scales still damp and shiny, and over it he put more seaweed, lay on coals,

Then we'd wait:

and finally covered it all in sand.

the adults sipping beers, while we kids went looking along the high-tide line for shells, driftwood, and glass floats from Japanese fishing nets. Once we found a starfish with 32 legs raved out from its center like the pictures we drew of the sun in the sand. And we'd race back, dodging waves, to watch our mother, our father carefully remove each layer until it lay steaming on its bed of dark green. They peeled back the skin to reveal the firm moist orange-pink muscle that slid from the bones as easy as water flowing over the stones in the creek it was born in. As we ate the meat dissolved in our mouths and swam on through the seas of our cells.

James Dott

Chasing Rainbows

Every now and then I'll see him. The sun will be just right flaring through the trees, diffusing the shadows, bouncing glare from the water in a cascade of sparkles.

He'll be creekside, crouching, knees bent and sitting low, his fly rod lying across his thighs, his head leaning forward, eyes intent, peering into the fast moving water.

Sometimes, chasing rainbows with my children, I pause looking downstream and I see him hunkered in the shadows.

"There," I hear him say softly.
"There the big fish lie hiding.
Where it takes the right lure properly presented to tease a fish from its lair.
Where it takes the right touch to catch it on the smallest of hooks and work it through the riffles and into the creel."

Even when the sun is lost, swallowed by dark clouds and the first thin raindrops of a coming storm cause thousands of tiny circles to ripple onto the water's surface, even then when the forest is filled with the silent clarity that precedes thunder I see him by the water

jeans, blue work shirt and hunter's cap, a tan fishing vest, cigarette dangling from a hawkish face squinting through horn-rimmed glasses.

I wish I could hold these moments and look at him closely, to see those strong hands, the stubbled face, the mischievous grin and piercing eyes again.

But, as with all visions, it seems, any attempt at seeing clearly, focusing, and it's gone.

Still, when I take my children chasing rainbows along the stream, I'll catch a fleeting glimpse of a short, wiry man crouching creekside, and I point, saying softly, "There. There the big fish lie hiding. Where it takes the right lure..."

And my son and daughter hear the voice of the grandfather they never knew.

Bill Graffius

My Kind of Haiku, too

Cranberry bog blooms
The steamy mist arising
New fawn bounding through

Dawn Dunham Parker

Hush: Blackberry Vines

hush: blackberry vines slip through rusty cab displace mankind's brash, brief stay

Estelle Seeley

Log Truck in Blackberries



Estelle Seeley

I Am Wind

patterns in the sand swirling movement underneath you do not wait for me but gently beg my play roaring thunder fills my being no other sound but you my separateness becomes apparent as I lean into your empowering grace splashes of nectar dance on my skin indiscriminate sensations of pleasure I want to drink you in one minute drop at a time expanding tractions of a nanosecond into eternity the taste of salt the smell of vastness fill me with wonder and I am lost to you in love the coldness of my fingertips brings me back and I am separate from you again and yet, I know, all it takes is one deep breath and I am wind to infinity's end

Lynn Potter

Racing The Mist

Floating down through the hollow like a lost child

wandering
between the thick
moss covered trunks

Stealing with a cold hunger after warm skin

to touch. My
naked flesh flees
from its wet kiss

Gold, red, and brown flashes fly from my fleeing

feet. Leaping over languid deep forest streams.

Toes sinking in the soft loam at their edges.

Vinemaple slapping my chest I burst into

the early morning meadow victorious

once again.

Feeling the dawn's small fires ignite

every nerve

with primal joy, as my playmate

dissipates

into golden luminescence

James Ricketts

A Salt Air Harvest

My heart circled the idling ocean and ran on. I had resurrected myself, Risen three hours before the sun, Sailed through rare witch wind air.

From the rail at Second Street's end, two street lamps Burned a Cheshire's cheeky stare; I directed my face upwards, eyes closed, And permitted the Velcro tongue of September to Preen my fuzzy felt cheeks While every life in town Kneaded my chest with prickly claws. A purr revved contentedly in A cat's cradle of night and sand.

In the drive at home I scuffed gravel.
I saw over my shoulder, in an hour of a year,
I had reentered boot camp;
Breathed old air from new;
Had thrust my father's life before me;
Caressed the cool numbness in his hands;
Had dressed the weakening breaks in his heart.
I pounded my own heart,
Pinched my own skin;
I witnessed the herringbone sky rift,
Then strip the orange moon.

My morning dawned.

Virgil Bowman

In The Path Of The Tsunami

Tonight I sink into my feather bed and think about how we'll die, and three of us in this house, my boys riding the wind downstairs, one stub of a candle to see me down to their bedroom, those two I'd run down hell's back stairs of fire to find.

Finished with the power lines, they're down, the wind toys with the house, rowdies the roof and walls, won't sleep, past three on my ticking clock and, fretful child, it won't let me

shifts my organs into commotion with relentless shakes of the bed and surely the feathers are floating, small, almost imperceptible to my mind, but organs know and they're nervous like the watchful back of my brain, thinking about dying tonight in the dark and heavy rain

reminded what's coming, what's to face, when the big one comes that's got to come to the northwest coast, more-than nine-point release of the lithospheric plates, bedrock sounds you've never heard, wires and candles out, gasline flames lick up and down the streets and they're on your stairs

and it lifts you off the bed, trying to find your heart,

more stark awake even than tonight, gravity replaced by air, no way for your legs to carry you to reach those sons down there. best every night anoint their heads and kiss them the sweet goodbye.

You know it already, tight in your gut, and tonight it's in your mind, how you're fooling yourself how when it slows down you're just going to run

'cause then the ocean rolls out its monster of a tongue, right over all your bedrooms, coming far too fast and loud and strong and soon for you and yours, it's big and bad and bitter cold and has no fear and there's nothing you can do so give in to it, tonight.

Florence Sage

Undertow

Having trod sharp rocks fingered embossings on a four-armed starfish escaped anemone's grasp

Having borne the crab's rickety retreat stalk-eyed and resentful I lifted my eyes to the dunes

Lying on and under blankets with Nabokov a bottle of warmth shades against the glare

<u>Madama</u> in my ears I dozed and dreamed and woke as butterfly's heart burst

And down the beach some trouble red lights loudspeakers a small crowd

I turned pages until your bleeding feet and dripping hair interrupted

Blue-lipped red-eyed in a borrowed blanket stamped LBPD in tow of paramedic

I wish you'd drowned and I could spit

this bitter taste of grassy cud and dress in widow's weeds

I wish you'd drowned and gone to fishes and I could crepe myself in kelp, in seaweed brine

I wish you'd drowned that day and I could spend my tears in mourning at the shore

I wish you'd drowned and I could walk the rooftop widow's walk safe among the keening firs

I wish you'd drowned that day and I'd been saved instead

Donna K. Wright

The Journey

We become fatigued by life Slowly one day at a time Successes Failures Love found Love lost

This shell and vehicle Once a friend Now becomes less cordial

You feel the same Within Yet the mirror tells a different tale

You grow weary of decisions Experiences Disappointments

Life's joys
Grow more profound
And you become more of what you are

Tones become deeper Resonance becomes fuller Colors become richer

You gradually become a sum of all

Each experience
Each relationship
Each sunrise and sunset
All equal the who of you

Your journey nears its end Each path taken Led to your destination Yet each arrival makes you long For another Was the journey really the goal?

You begin to wonder What did I accomplish? What did I achieve? Was my stack the highest? Does it matter?

Regrets become reflections
The past is only a moment in time

You realize learning is the food of life Loving is the sunshine

Each day you move forward One step closer Toward the sunshine Toward the sunshine

Sue Falkner Wood

Crone

She was an older woman, eyes of mirrored smoky amber, hands of faded parchment wrapped over gnarled bones, carved like driftwood, from the oceans on her shore.

Her lips, like over ripened pomegranates stretched tightly against her smile, as she danced along the board walk, her small torso whipped like a thin reed from the breath of a north coast wind.

She had lived her life out loud, pulling it hard against her breasts, squeezing the juice from its core, until she was fat from its nutrition, solid from the sparks of the cliffs she had climbed. and the mountains she had fallen from.

She was unmoved by decorum's requirements, as she spun to the sound of crashing waves singing the songs of sirens, kissing the salt air as if it were alive, undulating in rhythmic bedroom movements, untamed, sexy, liquid, alive.

Like black stars nailed to her spinning sun, it is hard for us to view her unclothed clarity, or hear her songs of unbridled symphonies, uncomfortable at the sight of her incandescence and the joy of her serrated proclamation.

We live on the fringe of her universe, moving to the comfort of our Novocain our souls studded with grappling hooks, leaving us fearful of her medicine walking on the edge of a hard rain, our dreams, a cadaver on the floor.

Imara A. Jabari

Pajama Party For One

Last year rather than dieting I Resolved to Parade about in public Comfortably dressed Which is why you saw me Cavorting about town and Careening through Safeway's aisles Sporting soft wooly slippers and a Powder blue flannel Coordinated outfit Trimmed in white lace and ribbons Instead of Nikes and a heavy Drab gray cotton sweat suit that Apparently Would have made one of us More comfortable

Carol L. Little

Red

I just had to call and tell you The news is spreading through the entire neighborhood He has left her - packed his bags and left her Of course, I always knew he would You can't really blame him, she has such peculiar ways Such as reading until the break of dawn then sleeping through the days The poor man! Obviously that's why he stayed at his office so late Have you seen the countless mangy cats she keeps? Putting up with their incessant purring and rubbing against you legs could drive any normal man insane And how humiliating for a grown woman to be seen playing hopscotch with the children or dancing in the rain The poor man! No wonder he drinks every day I was told she went so far as to having opinions Openly defying his authority on subjects from A to Z Imagine the unbearable stress involved with that No man wants to come home to a woman who reads, has her own ideas and fraternizes with cats The poor man! I can understand why he has someone on the side But the strangest quirk about her when it's all been done and said Was her irrational refusal to never, ever wear the color red The poor man! One can only pray he finds the happiness he so deserves

Jeanette Thorpe

Memoir Of She

She was like a brilliant notion trapped in the irony of a lucid dream As I watched her disappear into the plush ivory carpet her stormy eyes slipped through 'beyond' and, by light of reflection, I glimpsed her soul

Her thoughts rested on pillars of ice as if reaching them would melt her essence I saw invisible pain turn into liquid and escape through her throat Only to return like an abusive mother to her beloved young

In her vile motion she created casualty of chaos Under invitation, her sin devoured every morsel of her being Prayerfully I blinked and I knew nothing

Jené Ricketts

Sleepers Awake!

The marvelous starling, looking skyward, squawked incredulously at the moon. O wild one AM bird gone mad with glee, a literal lunatic exorcising demons from his pulpit in the sycamore tree. Of course, with that visionary up there, routing celestial traffic between Earth and stars and searchlight moon, orchestrating these humid hours of hard convict sleep, riddling the scared prison yard of our dreams, we tossed and turned and cursed from the window.

He may have been a prophet, I don't know, but that whacked out bird just had to go. My neighbor had a flashlight (said he had a gun), so we shined it on that zany bird, tried to break his fevered reverie. No luck--damn bird was oblivious to everything, nothing would stop that crazy song he had to sing. Then, maybe an hour later or so, for no reason we could see, the oracular one, mystic starling, stopped, dropped dead from his tree.

Robert Brown

Outside Go Want

A dog starv'd at his master's gate Predicts the ruin of the state William Blake

- 1. According to the once great and now widely dismissed linguist, Benjamin Lee Whorf, the language of a society directly and precisely reflects the inner thought patterns of its people. In other words, you think what you say and you say what you think. There is no hidden language of thought buried deep within the grammar of the brain.
- 2. According to the once great and still considered great, although a bit wacko, anthroposophist and supersensitive being, Rudolph Steiner, dogs have no memory. Although dogs may seem to remember you when you leave or a place when they arrive it is merely a physical response akin to hunger. They have no true awareness of the past, which is the definition of memory.
- 3. According to the once and still very great but also very dead philosopher, Martin Heidigger, the defining characteristic of the human is Dasein Being with a big B; self awareness. Man is the being (with a little b) whose Being (with a big B) calls his being (with a little b) into question. Although he did not address the issue directly it is highly doubtful that he would have attributed Dasein to a dog.
- 4. Considering symbiotically these three self-referentially related achievements of the early 20th century it strikes me that the answer lies in the ability to determine once and for all and definitively whether or not a dog understands grammar.
- 5. Being versed in the scientific method I set out to devise an experiment. To wit: the first premise (in the form of a first order Euclidian axiom): the dog wants to go outside because the dog always wants to go outside. The second premise (in the form of a K-A-tarthy lemma): the dog always knows (if we can say that

a dog actually knows anything in the sense of Heideggerian awareness) when I am going out and comes galloping to the door whenever it hears the slight jingle of the keys being slipped into my pocket. The third premise (in the form of a 4-2-deductive rule): if the sound of the keys is taken out of the scenario and the use of spoken language (in the Whorfian sense) is substituted, the grammatical abilities of a dog can be examined.

- 6. The setup: I wrap my keys in an old sock secured tightly in thick blue rubber bands formerly used to bind broccoli stalks together. The keys are now as silent as the song of the clouds. In addition, any supersensitive influence of the keys (in the Steineresque sense) can be assumed to be masked by the fact that the sock has not recently been washed (in the sense of being agitated in a solution of water and detergent).
- 7. Having removed all other variables the experiment can proceed to test the grammar understanding abilities of the dog. In other words, the Whorfian grammatico-cognito cognates of the species *canis familiaris* will be subjected to rigorous Heideggerian analytico-existential constructs within the Steineresque sensible physico-astral framework.
- 8. Day 1. I say slowly and clearly, "Dog, do you want to go outside?" There is no response. The dog on rug remains uninterested. Day 2. I repeat the phrase, "Dog, do you want to go outside?" again, no interest from the dog. Day 3. Once again the same utterance with the same results. I resolve to try a new approach. Language or not, the dog really needs to pee. Day 4. I carefully unwrap the keys, while jingling them ever so slightly, say, "Dog, do you want to go outside?" The dog runs to the door. We go out. I am relieved. The dog is more relieved. Day 5. I jingle the keys with an audibily lower decibel level while saying, "Dog, do you want to go outside?" The dog immediately runs to the door. Day 6. Without jingling the keys I say, "Dog, do you want to go outside?" The dog responds. I symbolically thank the spirits of Pavlovian dogs who hover in their hyperborean plane. Day 7. I carefully rewrap the keys in the sock and secure them with broccoli rubber bands. It appears (at least in

the Skinnerian sense) that the dog understands the meaning of the phrase, "Dog, do you want to go outside?" This can be interpreted as proof positive that the dog, whether or not it is ready, is ready to proceed on.

- 9. Day 8. I begin the grammatical tests. First I remove the inquisitive intonation, "Dog, do you want to go outside?" No problem. Then, I rearranged the word order, "Outside you do go to want." The dog understands. Day 9. "To want you do go outside." Understanding remains intact. Day 10. I remove two thirds of the two letter words ending in "o." "Go want outside you." The dog shows no signs of diminished understanding. Day 11. "Want outside go you." Full understanding remains. Day 12. Hesitantly I remove the personal pronoun, "Want outside go." The dog is unphased, running to the door as usual. My journal entry for the day notes a major breakthrough. On subsequent days I try various permutations and combinations: "Outside go now," "Want now outside go," "Go want now outside," "Outside want go."
- 10. The dog understands them all, but more importantly the dog does not notice the difference. The dog makes no complaint. The dog does not attempt any grammatical correction. Sadly (in the sense of a foreboding melancholy), the dog does not show even the least interest in proper grammar. I try to remain objective. I try not to become emotionally involved. I tell myself it is only hard, cold science. I publish my findings in the highly respected journal of the *Linguistic Tetrapod*, but I cannot sleep at night. I am devastated within the language of my mind. I truly believed in the grammatical abilities of the dog. Perhaps this belief is merely the wishful thinking of a delusional personality, but is it not a master no less then the great William Strunk Jr. himself who writes in no less than the very first rule of elementary usage, "It's a wise dog that scratches its own fleas."
- 11. My self-deprecating plummet into the abyss of selfperpetuating inner turmoil begins its dizzying and uncontrolled downward spiral into the very depths of the lower reaches of the blackest moments of the soul. I remain bedridden in a state of

severe grammatical inability for many days unable to eat except for a few crumbs of organic, vegetarian dog biscuit. I ponder relentlessly the relationships between the proper use of colons and the ethical dominion of fur-covered beings. I wonder over and over where I could have gone wrong, what fundamental mistakes I could have made. But no, the data speaks for itself. The interpretation, based on sound scientific principle, is correct. Whether it was the very hand of the creator or the spoils of evolution that brought it about is of no consequence. The dreadful reality is one of a grammarless dog. My despair is my disrelationship. It is no less than the relation which relates itself to itself.

- 12. Several weeks later at the end of my linguistic rope, reading Kierkegaard for my only comfort and Strunk and White for my only joy, I am snapped out of my darkest moment of despair by the chance realization, no, the revelation (in the neo-Kekuleian sense) that a grammarless dog does not necessarily, in and of itself, imply a dog without memory.
- 13. I begin work immediately. With the vigor of a shaggy pack dog and the company of a voiceless lone wolf, with the teleological awareness of a post-natal Lazarus, with the ethical and scientific misunderstanding of grammatical aggravation, I set out without recourse to recourse in pursuit of a new treatise.

Luc Fenix

White Walls

His large, scarred hands are like poorly drawn maps, each telling its own story with mismatched purples and reds, intertwining on deep-rooted avenues. He is turning them slowly in the space of air before his face, inspecting each gnarled bony finger, each scraped knuckle, scrutinizing each scab and blood-crusted cut. On the outside, a forbidden haven awaits him in vain full of laughter, full of tears, full of pain. On the outside, the streets reek of freedom.

"Do you know who I am?"

He lifts his eyes to the disturbance of my voice—pauses—and returns to the harbor of his hands.

Jené Ricketts

Pressed For Time

The subtle crunch
Of leaves along the path
Stirred in me
Sepia-toned memories
of simpler times
When
Children frisked like squirrels
In swept-up heaps
Of fallen leaves.
Brisk cool breezes
Beckoned fall to arrive
Right on schedule.

No one hurried.

No one scurried to gas-up the car, to drop-off the laundry or meet the plane.
I slowed my pace (but just a little) To contemplate: Where am I In this stream of time?
I stoop and carefully select one, A gleaming brown maple With flecks of gold To press in my book.

Someday (Or maybe later),
I will place this leaf with Grandma's photo
Remembering her
And those simpler times
With fondness
Preserving
This moment under glass.
Tell me leaf, what lesson for today?
Will I always and forevermore be
Pressed for time?

Janet Willener

Umpire

"They need an umpire Daddy"
I hear her say.
But I am not her daddy and
she's not talking to me.

Though I have heard those words a hundred times, her daddy is ten years younger and just one of many

watching their daughters play tee-ball today. It's been six summers or so since last I stood to answer

that call, and I watch as the opportunity begins to slip away. My youngest doesn't even look my direction... she has

never known me to be a part of her games. All I do now is watch. Will she receive short shrift because... "I've

already done my part" with the four older siblings? Is my desire to be a part of her life less than to be

a part of theirs? Walking to her coach I express my love for my youngest daughter and call the first pitch a strike...

James Ricketts

Chances

We're ten seats deep on the third base line. I can picture Niehaus up there in the press box fiddling with his headset.

My radio's at home,
but in my mind I can hear his voice.

I wish you could see this sky, friends.

Looks like a great big chunk of blue ice.

If you had a big ice pick,
you could reach up and chip off a piece of it.

Yaztremsky once admitted that he failed nearly seventy percent of the time, and so have I.

Yet here we are, my blue-eyed daughter and hazel-eyed son, drifting through space on a baseball-shaped planet, floating like a Moyer change-up; sitting under an ice-blue Seattle sky, watching Griffey dance like Baryshnikov through the center field grass.

And I say,
What are the chances?

Mark Mizell

Quiet

Quiet, I want quiet, that elusive place that waits somewhere, sometime. It will come after years of fighting and laughter, and endless rounds of games and songs that include Rock and Rap.

When it comes I will bask in its sunshine, and noise will become only an echo. By the time quiet has finally found me, I may hate its sound, but for now I covet it. I would escape to its comfort and rest.

It came one evening months ago, the silence. the children were with Grandpa and Dad down at the shore, competing with the roar of waves. There were no wicked swords, guns, or feet killing monsters, Spiders and triffids on my walls. No babies crying for bottles and dry diapers, no children wanting supper, and no teens arguing over who borrowed whose clothes more and who talked on the phone the longest and last. I paused and listened as I entered into this longed for and elusive peace.

"What shall I do with this time?" I asked myself. "How long will it last?" Suddenly, multitudes of possibilities came creeping into my thoughts. An uninterrupted meal, a bubble bath soaking until my skin wrinkled? I could read, run, exercise, mop a floor, clean a cabinet, on and on my mind kept on inventing the activities I could accomplish.

That was months ago and almost forgotten, pushed aside by that dragon—Reality. From morning until night, others command my time. They demand my very essence. I want to be free and dance to my own drum, but what of responsibility and reality?

Someday I will find it again, I will come home from work and it will be there. Again I will explore the endless possibilities, and I will probably go fix myself a peanut butter and jelly sandwich and become depressed, again.

Nada Harrison

Hi Mommy

To drawing class one fateful day A young maid came, but not to play At union scale, she reasoned that of course she'd pose for three hours pay

In sunshine meant for making hay scant shadows clothed her as she lay as nonchalant as stretched out cat her birthday suit on full display.

With easels poised a certain way old men and young were held at bay while peering, leering, jeering at the model, naked as a jay.

One older artist: hair of gray, on leaving there was heard to say "Tattoos, OK, but rings are OUT! When we get home, there's hell to pay!"

(My daughter posed nude in my art class, I found this disconcerting)

Janet Willener

Learning To Play Violin At 45

Her father's ghost has begun to play A Bach minuet with tender grace. His old violin has filled her days

with formal practice, odd matinees of being grand, no alcohol trace. Her father's ghost has begun to play

with babies, roses, cameras, clays, and messy finger paints, paper lace. His old violin's lifting her haze.

Her pater pushed his music away with work and liquor, a frantic pace. Her father's ghost has begun to play

mellifluous songs for each soiree she holds to crack his tough carapace, Old Poker Face, his cold sobriquet.

Though she'd never heard her father play, she imagines his enraptured face. Now his daughter ghosts in negligée, blasts the Marseillaise, her latest craze.

Karen Braucher

Barbara

My child the songster, Chirps merrily on her way Dishes forgotten

Nada Harrison

All The Way Home

If I'd looked up, I'm sure I would have made it drop and I'd be dead, but I didn't, so here I am. I kept looking at my little black shoes instead, banging on the dusty road, falling in thumps as my insteps jerked on the straps of my Mary Janes, and the full skirt I loved to twirl flattened against my pumping knees, each step a leg length closer to my house and my mom, my eyes down on my progress, I ran faster than the swirling dust.

I never looked because the wind kept me busy running while the papers and rulers and books and erasers and the bird cage where we kept the class canary and even the chalkboard I'd just been cleaning as the edge of the tornado struck came tumbling, flapping, clattering to chase me home from school, and so did my curls whipping my eyes from behind, and so maybe that's why I sped for home and her, and never noticed

the persistent shadow taunting me, and never looked to see what my mother saw, the roof of the schoolhouse flying precisely as fast as I was, in a heated tango exactly over my head, for the space of the longest breath my mother ever took--as she stared from our doorway at the scene playing out until I took the one turn from the platted road to our lane that led me straight into her warm milk and cookie dough arms.

Florence Sage

Lesbianism and Acts Of God

When they were little I tailored my explanations to fit their level of understanding. When the dog hunched up on the front lawn to leave a gift eventually meant for my carpeted entry, I looked into those curious, round eyes and said it was because he was "making a potty." When the same dog hunched up on another dog, I said, "Oh, they're just playing and roughhousing around." Slightly off, but it worked. Inquisitions like this from a five-year-old, while uncomfortable at the moment, are easily handled and quickly forgotten. By them anyway. These moments made great subject matter for chuckles over coffee and my friends and I share them like little battle scars.

As they got older, however, I discovered that these inquisitions began to last longer and have more detailed questions, which of course, required more detailed answers. My eight-year-old asked me point blank and quite nonchalantly from the next room, "Mom, what's a lesbian?" Having already made the parental promise to forever tell the truth to my kids, I was bound to answer. Unfortunately for me she had a friend over and they were coloring at the kitchen table. I quickly scrambled through my mind looking for an age-appropriate response. I mean, when it's your own child, you know what their level of understanding is, but are you bound by your parental promise when there are other children present?

I decided it would be best not to stumble around and avoid the question because I certainly didn't want them thinking it was a dirty word. So, hurry up, what do you say on a spur of the moment? I stalled. "Where did you hear that word?"

"On the news," voices in unison from the kitchen. They must have been conferring on the definition before they asked.

The stall worked, because I was ready now. "The word lesbian is just another way to say a woman who's in love with someone—like I am in love with your dad—only the someone they're in love with is a woman, too." Eloquent enough, I think, and gives the right mental images.

"Oh. That's kind of weird. Do they kiss?"

"I'm sure as many lesbian couples kiss as other couples."

"Hmm... do they get married?"

"Well, not all states allow lesbian couples to get married."

"Why not?" The curiosity had shifted. "Are states the boss of you or something? They get to tell you if you can't marry someone?" It didn't seem right, even in the fresh, unbiased mind of a child, that anyone should be able to dictate whom a person marries. I heard her use the new word a few times after that, adding it to her vocabulary, but I guess my definition was complete enough for her and I was happy with the first impression I'd left with her.

How, then, do you explain to this same child a few years later when her beloved music teacher begins to write letters to the editor of our local newspaper in support of Lon Mabon and his prejudice toward people whose shoes he's never walked a mile in? How do I help her understand when I don't understand it myself? I realized how difficult and uncomfortably embarrassing it is to explain our society to children sometimes. I put in careful thought, intentionally making sure I don't inflict value judgments on my children in regard to other people's choices and now I must decide if I should allow my child to spend an hour a week, alone, with someone who is a publicly admitted bigot. I make an attempt and begin a discussion about how we can deal with people we admire as experts in their field, but try not to learn too much from them as a person. I tell her that I'm sure her teacher "truly believes she is doing the right thing because she interprets the Bible a certain way and she feels she is doing what God wants her to do." I add, "But sometimes, people are wrong, honey. And I suppose you and I have a harder time than some people do feeling anger and hate toward someone we don't even know. It's called tolerance and lots of people in this world need more of it."

And that was that. She seemed indignant at the notion that anyone she knew could be involved with hating someone without just cause. We talked and talked about the world and differing views on everything from tomatoes to God but I still couldn't explain it sufficiently for her mind to understand. But she was satisfied to know that some people are different and we can't suppose to understand them any more than they can

understand us without knowing us. The subject didn't come up again.

A year later, my daughter still goes to the same music teacher and she admires her for the wonderful musician and patient instructor she is. I thought long and hard about whether to move her. My hand was on the phone more than once to call and discuss the matter of leaving. But I chose to leave things as if I had never heard her intolerant personal opinions. I realized that by making the choice to withdraw my daughter from her tutorship, I might be practicing my own intolerance about the teacher's perspective. I made it clear about my position on the matter to the person that counts and I am satisfied with my daughter's reaction and handling of the situation. I know she'll be a fine, dignified, tolerant woman one day (much too soon). In a way, I learned something. I learned that it's good to expose my children to different views and personality types throughout their growing years because that is just life. There is no way to get around the fact that they will come into contact in their future with people of all beliefs, similar to theirs and very different. And when my kids encounter intolerance and hatred, they will have had some experience dealing with it on a mature, thoughtful level. And they will be the better for it.

I remember thinking when I got the question about lesbianism, "How hard was that?" I wish all questions were as simple to explain. I mean, a literal definition of a word given to the mind of a child is absorbed according to how you string the words and spin the images together. Or choose not to.

V.A. Russell

Sky's Passion

That spring - his 9th birthday model rockets were his only desire — they came with extra engines, red, white, black paint — a fat book of diagrams. He reads, assembles, glues, applies tender brush strokes until way past midnight — gets up early. No breakfast. Equipment in tow he prances into the damp orchard stuffs in fire-proof wadding, inserts fuses, folds the parachute just right fits the nose on. We gather to watch the launch - so high so fast over budding apricot trees and then . . . we hunt. Through chest high neon yellow mustard flowers — 40 acres — we trample paths looking for reusable parts. Sometimes we find them - sometimes we don't. Crash landings take their toll perhaps he should build a new one? Better than the last — a bigger parachute to slow the fall — so our eyes can follow its path back to earth. Building a rocket takes time. Summer we plow mustard under to nourish fall's harvest, every few days we cheer a take-off and landing — on rough clods of clay rockets are easy to find but their returns no longer cushioned by neon vellow. Sometimes they survive — sometimes they don't. He might have to build a new one - better than the last — even bigger parachute to slow free-fall . . . And he does — best rocket yet. Saved all his money for this 4-foot beauty, a challenge even for expert hands, weeks of construction - and days and days of

tiny brushes, red and white

checker-board body — black nose — the best part is the nose containing a padded capsule designed to cradle a raw egg all the way into space and back again If you build it just right . . . unharmed. We watch while apricot trees drop their leaves - he tests the wind. Over six months of dedication have prepared him for this — he squats on plywood launch-pad aims the nose, lights the fuse — everyone counts...10...9...8...7... suddenly fire blasts forth - ROARS from the engine — thenwhooooooosh! It goes so high so fast we lose sight of all but the jet trail. For 5 seconds the world stops then, There it is! Here it comes! There it . . . goes somewhere over there — behind the barn! In the chicken coop a fuselage — some reusable parts surrounded by curious hens. They cluck nervously as the spotted rooster struts and cocks his head from side to side — to get a better view of that strange red, white and black intruder lying in the dust . . . and that thick, gooey mass of yellow oozing out, puddled up all around. You know eggs and rockets are like that — sometimes they make it and sometimes ... they don't.

Anusuya Silga

The Scent Of Eucalyptus

The scent of eucalyptus is overwhelming. As I turned from the side street onto the railroad tracks I can see the fragrant trees shading both sides of the rails. The sun filters through the long slender leaves and dances on the ground. The acorn-like seed pods crunch beneath my shoes as I begin to walk. God, how I've missed these trees.

As I trod over the dirt, rocks and the multi-colored eucalyptus leaves that litter the ground, a childhood full of walks just like this comes rushing back. My backyard was a steep slope covered in fragrant honeysuckle. At the bottom of the yard were the tracks. Two trains journeyed by every day. Those tracks were my playground.

A tall gnarly tree stood at the end of the yard, just above where a five-foot drop gave way to the train tracks. Someone had hung an old-fashioned swing from a branch, with a wide plank for a seat and heavy ropes to suspend it. When I really got going the swing would carry me over the tracks and I would look both ways to see if a train was coming. It never did.

I can vividly remember my mother patiently teaching me to pump my legs to propel the swing through the sky. It seemed to take me forever to learn that skill, I was never a very coordinated kid. Looking back I realized that those snippets of time alone with my mother were rare occurrences. She seemed to always be working. Or cooking, or cleaning, or drinking.

We were forbidden to play on the tracks. But Mom was gone most of the time and left to our own devices we would do whatever entertained us the most. My best friend Gary and I would climb down the drop off and put our pennies on the rails. Someone had told us when the train wheels ran over them the coins would be left as flat as a pancake. Trouble was, we could never find them again when we went back to check. We also spent endless hours with our ears pressed to the warm metal, listening for oncoming trains. But, somehow we never could hear them.

My big sister was supposed to watch me when Mom was at work or out in the bars. But she hated having to be in charge and would gladly see me go off with Gary to look for

mischief. One day we took Gary's dog, Timber, with us on an adventure. We walked for miles (or so it seemed) seeing who could balance on the tracks the longest. Timber ran ahead, diving into the brush to roust birds. He came running back from one trip off the tracks bleeding profusely from his paws. The dog had found broken

glass hidden in the bushes and cut his paws to shreds.

We panicked. We knew Timber could not walk back home in that condition. What should we do? We couldn't carry him, he was too big. And if we went for help, we knew we would certainly be in trouble for being on the tracks. There is no terror like that of an eight-year-old who has been backed into a corner by their own deeds. Reason won out and I ran for help. My sister rounded up some friends and found Gary and the injured dog waiting by the tracks. They rigged a palate of sorts with a large white sheet and holding all the edges, we carried him home. I don't believe I will ever forget the sight of that whimpering German Shepard laying in the middle of a massively blood soaked sheet.

Were we cured of our love of the tracks? No. We couldn't seem to stay away.

On sunny days we would cross the tracks and enter the eucalyptus groves that lined the sides. The trees were full of rickety forts that the bigger kids in the neighborhood had built. Gary and I always wanted to play in them but we were too afraid that we would be discovered by one of the fort owners and beaten.

We found trouble of another kind. On the far side of the grove was the country club. The cocktail bar there was one of Mom's favorites. There was a great spot in the course where the fairway sloped heavily. We knew that when the golfers hit from the tee they could not see their balls until they had trudged to that point of the long fairway stretch. We had a perfect spot in the trees right next to the course. When the balls landed on the fairway across from our lair we would run out and grab them as fast as possible. Watching the nattily dressed golfers from our hiding place search in vain for the balls was pure joy. Did it get any better than that?

If we trekked far enough south on the tracks we would come to a large ravine. An old wood trestle crossed over a little

creek there and it seemed like the height of danger to dare to cross. Because you never knew when a train would come and we might just be caught in the middle and have to jump for it. Of course we did know when the trains came, so the risk was minimal, but in our stories we always had a terrifying brush with death.

But now it is so many decades later and I leave the tracks when I reach the old trestle. I seem to remember a path nearby that will take me to Hidden Beach, a favorite spot for locals who wanted to get away from the tourists. I find the path but nothing else looks the same. There are houses all around and roads that were never there before. Oh, the creek is still there, slowly making its way to Monterey Bay. The antique trestle is there and the whispering perfumed trees. Those divine trees that still visit me in my dreams.

The path ends and I realize why I am so confused. Hidden Beach is no longer hidden. Fancy homes line the sand in both directions. Houses teeter on the edges of the cliffs overlooking the shore, and the bay is crowded from end to end. Nothing is the same. Only the trees, the trestle, and the tracks.

Leslie Pugmire

Frozen

With the east wind biting our faces we turned the corner.

My children ran on ahead, laughing, pointing, exclaiming!
I stood silent.
Staring into the saddest brown eyes I'd ever seen.
She was sitting.
Just sitting.
Blending into the old rumbled, torn cardboard box like it was a cherished one hundred percent brown leather Lazy Boy recliner.

Staring.

I was just standing. Staring too. My clean hair blowing, cheeks red from the harsh unforgiving east wind.

My children ran back to grab my warm, gloved hands, pulling me away from the female crouched in the corner of the structure.

She pulled a dirty torn piece of burlap over her head. Staring into her soft brown eyes, I left her.

Staring.

Christy Phillips-Matlock

Suicide

I will admit that I'm angry, You left us all without a goodbye. You never thought how you would make us feel, How could you do this? Why, oh why?

You left me without a thought, You never looked back, no regret. Now I look back on all the memories, And all I can say is, "Not yet."

If you could only see what you did to me, How much I'm suffering from my last memory. Would you take it all back, Or even feel a little sorry?

I will never forget all the good times, And how much fun we had together. You used to sing silly songs and make me laugh, But only one memory will last forever.

I'm sure when you decided to do what you did, You weren't thinking about me. Just come back now and take a look, You messed me up, can't you see?

I only have one regret,
When you came home, we never hugged.
It will take a long time to forgive you,
But I want you to know how much you were loved.

Joanna Saari

Elegy For My Father

At the age of 13 years, you left before my time, coughing up years of acrimony, gasping for breath at the kitchen table, ripping promise from an already tragic childhood.

You wanted me to be your possession, heeding your promise to a God who blessed you with a sacred son. You were to present me to this God, wrapped in garments of the clergy, teaching Xeroxed words thrown from your beliefs, like clay on a potter's wheel, formed in the image of your muse.

At first, I was malleable, almost liquid, flowing easily through the crevices of a linear philosophy, unsullied by the vagaries of inquiry, a floating buoy upon the waves of your persistent dogma.

It was unanticipated, my journey past your waiting shores, the metamorphosis of individuality, that quiet moment of reflection that stirred the river within me, and like a master architect, you sought to contain my white water, building dams from the steel of your criticism, seeking to contain my sudden wanderlust.

I escaped with your sword within me, its point tepid with infected rage, bleeding into a dark hole of recrimination, clotting into a gelatinous scab,

pulled open in periodic intervals, spilling profusely over the landscape of my fabricated leaps toward perfection.

I was a river once, full of dreams wet and new, dripping expectation, a liquid energy for all to taste, an aquifer in search of an ocean, where my tides could move unencumbered, and the air would paint sugar upon my waves.

At the age of 49, I find that you have never left me, my water forced underground by the weight of your celestial mandates, burning my entrails with the heat of your expectations, shattering my image into mirrored confetti, my soul held in your grasp like a ripe fruit, sweet with dark decay.

And I find that I could never please you, or as a consequence please myself, and I move in ever swirling circles, pulling on your sword, wounded, yet closer to my ocean.

Imara A. Jabari

Be Strong

It was a usual Tuesday morning for me as I woke up to the all too familiar sounds of my mother throwing up the contents of yesterday's consumption. I rubbed my eyes, and looked outside to see that it was another beautiful day in paradise, San Diego style. Nothing but blue skies as far as my eyes could see. There's something about sunshine that makes me feel like no matter how bad it is, it's not so bad after all.

Pulling my attention away from thoughts of the beautiful day was my mom. I could hear the wrenching sounds coming from the master bath. It was my mom choking on her own vomit. "I'm coming Mama," I hollered, picking up the pace as I turned the corner, while grabbing the old hair tie I used so many mornings before. I gently tied my mother's hair back, asked in an apologetic voice, "How long have you been up? Why didn't you wake me?" My mom, too sick still to reply, just shook her head as if to say no. I continued to rub her back until there was a pause in the horrible sounds. I reached for the towel on the towel rack next to me and helped my mother to her feet. With bloodshot eyes filled with tears my mom said, "Not exactly the best way to start our day now is it Honey? Maybe tomorrow will be better?" "Maybe," was the generic answer, but tomorrow just never came.

On this particular morning, my mom must have been feeling some guilt. I do not know what possessed her to, but she had made me a cold lunch in a brown paper sack. When I returned from my shower and saw the brown paper bag sitting on the counter my eyes lit up like luminaries on Christmas night and I exclaimed "For me?"

"It sure is, I made your favorite, bologna with Mayo and lettuce." I ran over to my mother who was leaning nonchalantly on the corner of the dishwasher as if it were holding her up, and threw my arms around her neck, "Thanks Mama, you're the best!"

Sadly enough, a homemade lunch was definitely cause for celebration. This was one of two times that school year that my mother had managed to prepare my lunch. I excitedly grabbed the bag, turned one more time to thank my mom with a

loving grin, and out the door I went.

On the days I came home for lunch, I would find my mom sitting on the edge of that king-sized bed in that tattered old yellow robe. A scotch on the rocks in a Hi-ball glass in one hand and a cigarette in the other (Alpine or Benson Hedges). Soap Operas were always on her T.V. during the day, and at the foot of the bed, lying open, was good ole' Webster's dictionary, looking up the words in the dictionary was her favorite pastime. I guess it was her way of keeping her mind occupied. Lunchtime was always the best time of day to catch her if you wanted to talk about anything of importance. After all, straight scotch or vodka on the rocks takes its toll quickly. If I came home at lunch, chances were good that I would be able to momentarily connect with my mom.

Not that day. That day I proudly displayed the sack lunch my mom had prepared for me. It was puzzling to me at the time that all the other kids at the table were making fun of me for bragging about my lunch. You see, to me, waking up each morning to hold my mom's hair back while she threw up, bragging on my sack lunch because it was a special occurrence, or coming home for lunch if I wanted to see my mom anywhere close to being sober, all were relative and familiar things in my life. To me it was, just life. You do not miss what you have never had, and when you do not have much, and are given even less, you appreciate everything you have, or ever will get. By the time bedtime rolled around, I was lucky if she could call me by the right name. Often she would slur, "Good night Eric." Eric was my younger brother who was nine.

I had an older sister, Sheila, who was 14 and rebellious as all get out. I also had a stepbrother, Mike, who was 15, and a stepsister, Wendy, who was 18. The years from 1974 to 1977 were only four chronologically. In terms of a learning curve, I learned more about life through that struggle than any other

time in my life.

My parents divorced when I was four. My dad wasn't very demonstrative and it caused discord in their marriage. Eventually my mom had an affair with one of the neighbors, Phil Fullerton. Shortly after, the big blow out occurred, which is still a little sketchy to me. I was young and all I can really

remember is that my mom and Phil's wife, Sue, got into an altercation one day. Sue must have confronted my mom and there was screaming and strangely enough, I remember it involved mustard.

Shortly after that, my brother, sister, mom, and I all moved out. At that time my mom was a very attractive 30-year-old. She was about 5'4", 125 pounds, a shapely figure with legs that would stop traffic. She had one of the most inviting smiles I have ever seen will full lips, high cheekbones with naturally curly hair. We ended up back in Oceanside, CA. My birthplace and my mom's hometown. We moved into my grandma's house, which she had lived in since moving from Las Vegas in 1943.

Three years went by with my mom working full time as a secretary at Grossmont College and raising us. We lived at the beach in a nice condo and my dad would pick us up on the weekends without fail. He was always punctual, with not only picking us up, but also with paying his child support. My mom was semi stressed but functioning fine, as I recall. She would have a few glasses of wine in the evenings, but nothing major. Then Phil came back into the picture, with his fancy cars, ski boat, four-bedroom ranch style home with a swimming pool, complete with his own two kids. He proceeded to woo my mom and within a couple of months, they were on their way to Las Vegas to get married.

I couldn't understand why their pending marriage was so unsettling for me. Phil had displayed only love for my mother. Although, I had been warned by my stepbrother Mike about his temper when he was drinking.

I knew things were all wrong when my mom and Phil returned from Las Vegas and their honeymoon. My mom was bruised and battered from head to toe. A blackish purple eye that was so swollen, it was shut. A fat lip with a big cut on it and the cut above her other eyebrow, with bruises up and down her arms and across her collarbones. In retrospect, I think that was the first of several times he cracked her ribs (which never healed in the four years we lived there). When I asked her what happened she hesitantly replied, "Ahh... we got in a car accident," and kept moving through the entryway right to the liquor

cabinet. She poured herself a large glass of vodka, never looking up at anyone, and preceded to her bedroom where she stayed for two weeks until most of the bruises had healed.

I ran to the window and saw that there was not a scratch on the car. That's when I knew we were in trouble. Phil broke her spirit within a year and it was downhill from there. She continued drinking so heavily that by the time they separated my mother was almost unrecognizable, she looked so awful. Her belly was so bloated none of her old clothes fit her. She was 30 pounds lighter. Her once shapely legs were reduced to toothpicks. Her skin was almost translucent and you could see her veins due to poor circulation and no exercise or sun. Her eyelids were so puffy you could barely see her eyelashes some days. She would get these awful boils on her body from the poison and toxins in her body, and she had been on her period for the last four months.

In June of 1977, Phil threw our dressers in the back of the truck and dropped us off at my grandma's house in Ocean-side. My grandma took one look at my mom, and as soon as Phil cleared the block, my grandma was loading my mom into her car and taking her to an inpatient treatment center. For a moment I felt hopeful, but it didn't last long. About eleven o'clock that night we got a threatening phone call from Phil. Apparently, the treatment center where my grandma took my mother must have called him for billing acceptance and he was hot! Consequently, Phil was on the telephone screaming at my grandma, saying that she had to "take Nancy out because he wasn't paying for it." My grandma told him, "you are a being without a soul, not even good enough to be considered a bad man," and hung up on him. My grandma had to go pick up my mom.

The next few months were better than they had been at Phil's but still chaotic. My mom, in desperation to get money for alcohol, stole some of my grandmother's checks and forged her signature all over town. The places my mom wrote checks at were places that my grandmother and my mother had patronized regularly since coming to town. Now, the once ever popular captain of the cheerleading squad whose caption under her senior picture said, "Nancy is just like a ray of sunshine, so

bright, warm and happy. Nancy is most likely to shine at what ever she chooses to do. It just feels good to be around her," had been reduced to crime in order to support her habit.

The unfortunate thing is that most people do not understand that alcoholism is a disease; you are never cured of and it can kill just like cancer. I did not understand it then, at 12. I just wanted her to stop, and she did not, could not. I remember one night sometime during that final summer I was sitting in the living room with my grandma sitting in her chair across the room folding clothes. My mom was in that old tattered, yellow robe slouched over to one side on the other couch. I remember looking over at her and feeling so lonesome for her, although she was sitting right there in the same room. Sadness overtook me and I began to cry. She just looked so pathetic like some homeless drunk person you might see living under a bridge. She was the picture of someone whose spirit had been broken. The look in her eyes was hard to explain, but if you have ever looked into the eyes of a wild mustang that has been "domesticated" you would understand.

This was not the first time my mom had seen my silent tears, but it was the first time in front of my grandmother. It angered my mother and she looked over at me and slurred the words, "Be strong Sonja, you be strong." Sucking up the tears and emotion, I tried to mind my mother, my grandma spoke up from across the room, "Nancy Alice, you leave that baby girl alone. She has good reason to cry," and she motioned me to come sit on her lap. I was torn, between minding my mom and going to my grandmother. I could not help myself as my grandma held open her inviting arms. The tenderness of a mother's love was something I so desperately yearned for and it did not matter that it was my grandmother, it was genuine love, and I was sucking it up. Grandma pulled me close to her and wrapped me up in her arms, rocking back and forth gently saying, "There, there Honey. If you feel like crying, go ahead and cry, just let it all out." I remember the feeling of comfort and security it gave me and it made me realize how long it had been since I had a feeling of security and comfort. I fell asleep in her loving arms.

Looking back now, I realize what my mom was trying

to prepare me for, basically, "Just life." I truly believe she knew her time was coming soon and wanted me to "be strong."

The summer slipped away in episodes of madness because of my mother's disease and her reluctance to do anything about it. She went to the doctor in mid-August because she had been bleeding for close to 7 months. She was told by the doctors if she did not quit drinking, judging by the preliminary tests they ran, and the extensive bloating of her stomach, her liver would not last more than a few months. I have to say, she did try, but the disease had such a grip, coupled with the emotional upheaval of just being beat down to a broken spirit by my stepdad, she never was too successful.

Then in September of 1977, my mom started asking my grandma strange questions like, "If I had to go away for a while, would you take care of the kids for me? You would, wouldn't you Mom?" I remember my grandma's face when she asked, "Of course I would, but where are you planning on going, Nancy?" "No place in particular Mom, I just wanted to make sure the kids would be taken care of if I had the occasion to go somewhere." The whole conversation was very disturbing to me and haunted me for the next five days.

On the morning of the sixteenth of September 1977, I found out why I felt so disturbed about my mom's questions to my grandma earlier in the week. I was on my third day at a new school. I had just started seventh grade at Jefferson Junior High. I had been sleeping pretty soundly when my grandmother came in the back bedroom to wake me up. As I opened my eyes, I remember not being alarmed (actually, I had no sense that anything was wrong, strange?). Anyhow, as she gently shook me, I could hear her saying, "Sonja honey, wake up, wake up." "What, what is it Grandma, is Momma sick?" Before she could muster up enough courage to tell me the situation I said, "Could you please just hold her hair back and I'll be right there, just five more minutes please, I'm still so tired." My grandma interrupted me and said, "No honey, it's not that, she's really sick! The paramedics are here!" I swear I was halfway through the kitchen by the time she finished her sentence.

As I rounded the kitchen corner into the living roo

down at the floor. They both had blank looks on their faces, as if the situation was not really happening. The sight I saw was a shock. My mother's naked, bloated body lay flat on a shining hard wooden board, square in the middle of the living room.

Surrounding her were six or eight paramedics, a large red chest filled with medical equipment, and a heart monitor. I scanned the room trying to get a feel for the situation. It was then that I really got scared. The paramedics were all working feverishly to stabilize her. They had those electric paddles and kept trying to shock her heart back into beating. I'll never forget that awful high-pitched screech coming from the heart monitor. The damn thing was flat lined and nothing the paramedics tried was working. Those poor paramedics, I could see the horror in their faces. Can you imagine losing a mother of three children right in front of the children's eyes? I kept thinking, hoping, praying that the flat red line was going to kick into heartbeats any second. It never happened. The paramedics continued to perform CPR for a good 40 minutes with that horrible sound screeching the whole time. I could read it on their faces. She was gone, and they did not quite know how to handle the situation with all of us sitting there. My grandma was standing in the corner, with her trembling hands over her mouth, just shaking her head in disbelief.

Eventually, the team lost momentum and started packing her securely for transport. I sat there motionless, with my knees pulled in tight to my chest, my arms crossed around my legs, watching for any signs of life. I saw none. The room was out of focus and it seemed like a dream. After the paramedics left, my grandma explained she had to go to the hospital and gave us all the choice to either go to school or stay home and wait for some word from the hospital. My brother and sister both opted to go to school. I waited there curled up in that chair, the same chair where my grandma had comforted me such a short time ago. My grandma had left for the hospital and my brother and sister had gone to catch the bus. As I sat in that chair, I could hear her words over and over, "Be strong Sonja, you be strong," and I was.

My grandmother was back sooner than I had thought. I rushed to the door to greet her, thinking it must be good news.

knowing in the back of my mind what the real deal was. My grandma stepped into the house with a sense of purpose in her stride. As our eyes met I could see her pain. I will never forget what she said; "Honey... your mama has gone to live in heaven. with God. She died at the hospital." I interrupted her, upset by her remark and in a raised voice I screamed, "No, no! She did not die at the hospital, she died right here in this house, right there on this living room floor, right here in front of us, not at the hospital!" It is strange the way your psyche processes things when you are in shock from emotional trauma. Those details seemed so important at the time. As I turned away from her and started across the living room, I had to step over medical tape, plastic tubing and small colored pieces of plastic, remnants left by the paramedics. I was reeling, attempting to digest what had just happened, and what the repercussions of it would be. I couldn't get out of that house fast enough. I ran out the back door and down the flight of stairs to the back patio. I crept under the flight of stairs and backed up to the wall and slid down into the cool soft dirt.

I have no idea how long I was there, when it dawned on me: she is gone, and never coming back. I did not know what to think but I knew how I was feeling, relieved. I was actually relieved that she was finally in a place where she could be free from her burdens, disease and pain. I hoped she was in a place where she was loved, unconditionally, and could feel that with every fiber of her being. I was relieved, and yet I felt guilty too when I started to analyze things. Was I just relieved that I would never have to help her throw up ever again? That I wouldn't have to watch her get drunk and see her slouched over in that tattered old yellow robe? That I would never again have to hear her slur her words, or was I relieved because she was at peace? Finally she was in a better place where she could release the torment of her past mistakes. Her spirit was no longer broken, healed from the inside out in an instant with white light. I was relieved and yet, perplexed too because death felt different than I ever imagined. It is so strange to come to the realization that, when you lose a loved one, you just miss that person who passed on, plain and simple. You just miss them.

At the funeral, and throughout the whole experience, I

never cried, once. I kept hearing my mother's words, "Be strong Sonja" and I was. Besides, crying wasn't going to bring her back and I didn't want to worry my grandma. After all, how torturous is it to outlive your children? My grandma never quite recovered from her death. My brother and sister were in shock and just carried on as if it had never taken place. To this day, if I ask my brother about his memories of that time he has very little memory of the whole time clear up to his sixth grade year.

Apparently, what had happened was my sister, Sheila and my mom were sleeping in the front bedroom when my mother began to cough and then choke. My sister, startled by the sounds my mother was making, ran in and woke my grand-

mother who, in turn, called 911.

The ambulance and paramedic reached the house within seven minutes of the call according to the police report. I believe she was gone long before the paramedics ever arrived. Her spirit was not present in the living room that overcast morning. At least during any of the time I was curled up watching from my grandma's chair.

At the funeral the saddest part of all was the look people gave my brother and me. My sister sat with her new boyfriend impatiently waiting for her opportunity to leave. The only surprise of the day was seeing Phil there. He was, and still is I guess, my stepdad. The divorce was never final, therefore, he was able to sit with the rest of the family members behind the sheer curtain. As he passed by my brother and me I remember just staring at him, thinking to myself, "I wonder if things would be different had my mother never come into contact with you." I could tell by his expression he had some remorse she was gone but he did not seem to claim any responsibility. Locked in eye contact I tried to let him see what I was feeling, and experience the insecurity of our future. Certainly, he must realize he played a part in her demise. My brother pulling me out of my seat trying to release his hand from mine once we were outside distracted me from the stare down. When I came to, and released my baby brother's hand, there were welts where my fingers had been. There were probably 200 people at the funeral, many of whom I had never met. They would approach my brother and me, it was such an uncomfortable feeling, and I just kept praying that it would end soon. Neither my brother nor I shed a tear at the funeral.

We all loaded in the limo and headed for the gravesite. The service was short and sweet and I felt a strange calm down in my soul as the casket was lowered into the ground. Before the pastor could say rest in peace, my sister Sheila, who had been standing in the back of the crowd snuck off with her new boyfriend.

Later on that day at the wake at my grandma's, my brother and I were told that we would stay in Oceanside and finish out the school year. It would take some time for my dad to build a couple rooms in his garage to accommodate us. Sheila would be going home with my dad the following weekend. My brother and I spent the rest of that day down in my grandma's basement acting as if nothing was wrong.

That night, and for the next year, I slept in the same bed with my little brother, clinging to each other for security. It was that night that the dreams started which brought on a couple of years of insomnia and anxiety. Always, the same dream of my mother in that old yellow tattered robe, she would be calling me on the phone, pleading for me to come and get her. When I would ask her where to come, she would say, "I don't know! Just please come and get me. I am cold and hungry and I miss you guys. I just want to come home and be with you guys, please, please Sonja, hurry!" I would wake up covered in sweat and so frustrated I just wanted to cry, but I never did.

The next morning after the funeral, yelling and cussing from the front of my grandma's house awakened me. My brother had gotten up and gone to school as if nothing had ever happened. My sister, on the other hand, had apparently brought someone else's boyfriend with her to her mom's funeral and stayed out half the night with him. there was an angry mob of six Chicano girls in the process of jumping my sister in my grandma's front yard. I was panicking, and started out the door screaming, "Hey you guys better get out of here the cops are on their way I just called 911, and an officer is in route!" They simultaneously got up from the knelt position they had my sister pinned while scratching her face. The girl with a tattoo on the

dad on my sister's finger. My sister had just coerced it out of my grandma the day before. The tattooed one told two of the girls to hold my sister down while she proceeded to twist the family heirloom off her finger. I was frozen in fear and couldn't do anything! With that token of victory, they ran off towards the high school, and the ring was never to be seen again. The scars from that day are still visible on my sister's face today. At least, they were still visible the last time I saw her six years ago at my grandmother's funeral.

I am now closing in on the age my mother was when she passed. I think about that now and it blows me away. I remember thinking when she died, "at least she lived a long full life." When you're twelve, it's relative. After all, reaching the ripe old age of thirty-seven was a long full life to me at that time.

I think about my children in that situation and what it must have been like for my mother once the honeymoon was over, literally! Having to live in such an abusive situation, trapped by her own regretful choices, with no light at the end of the tunnel. Witnessing your children being affected by all of the abuse (some more than others). My sister and her hot temper always caused Phil to lose his temper and physically abuse his closest target. Sheila, being Sheila, would stand there and antagonize him. Taking his punches with defiance until someone or something distracted him and diverted his attention. That was generally my mom, sacrificing herself, all because my stubborn sister couldn't keep her mouth shut. My mom was so good at making up some excuse where the bruises and broken ribs, etc. came from with surprising ease. All the while, drinking herself into a comfort zone that let her hang on for one more day. On one of her stronger days, when we still lived at Phil's, she actually mustered up the courage to take Polaroids of my sister and herself battered and beaten. Phil used to wear a square diamond ring on his right hand that my mother had bought him just prior to their marriage. That ring came back to haunt her time and time again. It left perfect square bruises that were almost orange and yellow in color, the kind of bruises that are a notch up from the purplish blue kind, anywhere he punched. My father found those pictures years later after my grandma died. They were in a lock box behind the hall closet door in a secret cubby. As tears

came to his eyes, he shook his head and wept, asking me "Why, why didn't you tell me! I didn't know, I didn't know!" I was speechless, filled with regret and guilt. I said without thinking about it really, and at the same time, knowing it was the truth, I said, "I was just too scared."

I did a pretty good job of dodging Phil. I observed real early it was not conducive to my health and well being to react with any kind of a temper, so I just never did. With the first sign of trouble coming from Phil, I would seek out my little brother and take cover, hiding somewhere in or around the house. One time, I did get hit in the back of my upper thigh with a mono shock that my stepbrother had taken off a Kawasaki 400. That mono shock was a heavy sucker and Phil threw that thing full force. It floored me dead in my tracks. As Phil's rampage continued I pulled myself best as I could without functioning legs, off that cold, black slate entryway floor and into the hallway. I managed to lock my brother and I in my stepsister's bedroom where we stayed, holding pillows tightly over our heads to escape the screaming. We woke the next morning, late for school and even though I had a hard time getting up, not a word was mentioned between us about my injuries or the already forgotten situation from the night before.

Growing up, I missed my mom. I really never had a chance to get to know her. She married Phillip Longfellow Fullerton when I was six. Shortly after that, the heavy, heavy drinking began and never really slowed until she was dead. There were very few conversations between her and me, no shopping sprees, no lunches at the mall, etc. I can count on both hands all the memories I have of my mother and me. I often wonder what she was really like. My grandmother always proclaimed I was a carbon copy of my mother, maybe so in many ways, I think not in others. I have noticed since my aunt sent my baby book, we have the same exact handwriting and you cannot tell us apart to look at pictures of us when we both were kids. Losing my mother when I was so young is something I think at times I have gotten past, but I will never get over.

One thing will never change, I will, for the rest of my life be an <u>A</u>dult <u>C</u>hild <u>O</u>f an <u>A</u>lcoholic and I will carry the scars that accompany that label. I miss her more now that I am grown

with children of my own, than I ever did growing up. I miss her for my children that have no biological grandmother, I miss her for the sake of carrying on family traditions, for the purpose and role of mother. The resource of having the one person you can call when you're in trouble, sick, upset, and have sick children and need reassurance, whether it's a problem or some good news and want to share it with someone who truly cares and WILL ALWAYS have your best interests in mind. All those wonderful perks most people take advantage of with their mothers. Those things I would give my right foot and all of my fingers for.

It is said that knowledge will set you free. Not always. Sometimes, it can create a prison. In 1994 just prior to my grandmother having a stroke (and ironically, lying on the living room floor two days before she was found, in precisely the same spot where my mother's body lay as she passed on), she invited me to California for a visit and paid for my son and me to come. She told me on the phone before I arrived she thought it was important I knew the truth. All those years, I had always been under the impression that my mother died from sclerosis of the liver. Not the case. I learned from the coroner's report from the autopsy my grandmother had performed after the funeral. Her death was the direct result of those beatings all those years.

As my mother lay in bed with my sister in the wee morning hours, an aneurysm in her brain burst and killed her within 7 to 10 minutes of the initial cerebral hemorrhaging that followed the aneurysm bursting. The choking my sister woke to was the effect of blood filling her lungs and by then it was probably too late to make any difference. The report also said there were so many aneurysms in her head, it was only a matter of time before she would either have a stroke or bleed to death internally.

I used to be so angry and hate Phil. That takes up too much energy. Now I just feel sorry for him: someday he'll have to answer for his actions and what could he possibly say to make it better? I have often thought about looking him up. I do feel I was cheated by his hand, cheated out of a mother, a lifetime of memories, and a grandmother for my children, cheated out of love that was my birthright. For that, I would have no problem approaching him and asking him to help me financially until I

finish school. There is no doubt he is a wealthy man. The problem is, I have no idea where he, my stepsisters or brother are. Any research I have done has been fruitless and a waste of my precious time.

I went back to my mother's grave one time. It was a hot summer night of my junior year. Three girlfriends and I were on our way to a drive-in movie. Along the way we had to pass the cemetery. I do not know what possessed me to make Teresa stop the car, but she did. I got out and ran for the 12' high chain link fence, scaled it, and headed in the direction I have remembered her gravesite being. Somehow I stopped right at it, and fell to my knees. My friends, running in the dark after me, found me weeping. It was the first time I had ever shed tears, holding true to my mother's idea of what it was to, "Be strong Sonja, be strong."

Looking back now, it sounds so horrible to hear myself tell stories about my childhood. To me, back then going through it wasn't anything so severe. To me it was "just life," nothing out of the ordinary. The nice thing about childhood for some people is the fact that you grow out of it. I prefer using all those learning experiences in my childhood to my benefit rather than my detriment. I've matured and come to realize many things. One of the most important being that even in the seeming seeds of tragedy is the hidden fruit of glory, everything that has happened in my life, the events in my life right now, they are all attached to some marvelous thing that lies beyond where I am now. I try to send my thoughts out on a shaft of faith; faith in tomorrow, my higher power, and myself, where the full meaning of today becomes apparent. I move forward in my mind and see myself standing at a high place, looking back at past and present circumstances, learning from and, at time, laughing at them. In doing so, I experience fortuitous events that have been placed in my life not by chance, but by choice. Everything experienced in my life has been a gift, even losing my mother. All of those experiences have shaped me into the person I am today and I am proud of the person I have become. I feel my mother and grandmother are around me often, and it gives me courage to carry on. Sometimes, on the grayest of days, I will catch the scent of how my grandmother's sun dried sheets would smell as I

crawled into her cozy bed. I often have dreams with them both present. I know she and my grandmother both are watching over me and mine until we meet again.

Sonja Engebretson

Someday

Someday I'll tell you

how I prayed each day for you to join me on the beach taking time off from work to throw bread crusts to the gulls

Someday I'll tell you

how just the sound of your voice made my heart race and skip gave wings to my earthbound soul helped me celebrate the joys of spring

Someday I'll tell you

how hard it was to listen without envy give advice that sent you to other arms watch you go from woman to woman searching for a lover once overlooked

Someday I'll tell you

how loving you unrequitedly gave me the courage, strength, and character to persevere on my own when your dreams pulled you further away

We could have been good for each other you and I in another time but maybe in this place you and I

Someday I'll tell you

Jan Bono

Stopping By Your Room to Get a Book

It might have been a pathway winding through tall stands of white fir where mosses clung to ancient rocks, and sunlight warmed the soft earth, so soft is the memory of that day we walked together.

It might have been a sun-jeweled river moving slow by our bed on the sweet grass bank, so sweet is the thought of your words when we lay side by side in the still afternoon.

Your hands were careful and kept a courteous distance between kindness and desire.

I prayed at cross purposes, first that you wouldn't love me, then I prayed you would.

There is nothing to regret. We did not take the river path or pluck the juiceful fruit. And time has mellowed the taste of your endless

returning over and over hungered, searching kisses.

Rae Marie Zimmerling

Saudi Arabian Letters

1.

Dear Katrinka, old lover,

In the market, everything: spices, brass, daggers, cell phones, jewelry.

I held up my hand to show your height. It wasn't difficult

to fit you—Arabic women from northern Africa are tall, slim

But blonde is ugly here. The shop owner brought the *adebve*,

long-sleeved, black robe to the floor, and the *scarve*,

black covering for your head and face. Only eyes and eyebrows

show. Beauty for a woman in public: eyes and a scent.

The fabric is light, synthetic. The brand, "My Fair Lady."

Bargaining started at 300 Riyals,

collapsed to 100 because you weren't coming

from America for hem alteration. All women---teenagers

housewives, even Lufthansa stewardesses--wear these in 110 degree heat.

Why do you want this costume?

Why do you wish to blend with the night?

Love, Richard

2.

Dear Richard,

Remember you're married now. I hold up the robe.

One could think of it as slavery.
But there is power

in invisibility. I want to wrap myself in darkness

and be judged only by my eyes and my words.

I add this cloak to my closet of disguises, my repertoire of tricks

and humiliations. Thank you for sending it.

They say the veiled wear gorgeous underwear, fabulous

shoes, and I will do my best. Look for me

and you cannot find me. Smell the wind, see eyes on fire---

I might be there. What is love but a veil?

Katrinka

Karen Braucher

Where I Am

darken halls no light to see endless corridors stretching for miles never ending i trip and stumble upon bodies on the floor those who did not make it but a light i do see and a hand reaching for mine to guide me through the endless maze the hand is soft and gentle as it takes my own light beams from the radiance of its eyes i look closer to recognize the face of my lover

Jennifer Binkley

Glass Heart

La vida es corta, Pero es ancha

Life is short but wide
Wide as your vermilion smile
Which is frequent enough to please
The small man in me. Certainly,
I must cause you occasional tears,
Though not so often to fill
A golden chalice or perhaps
One of pewter, as may be my just reward
For this cartload of human frailty.

Yes, I promise you, I am as fragile as those tall Lavender faced flowers that wave Like a delicate painted hand As autumn storms approach.

Life is short but wide.
You recite the words in Spanish
Your eyes bright and dazzling,
The way one might imagine
Bursts of colored rockets or flowers
Or brilliant light birthed in ice caves, deep, deep
Into an Arctic face.

Shaped by love alone. Shaped without frailty.

Oh, Gods of sunrise and sunset, I offer only my glass heart, A voyeur's crystal vase
Tepid with the scarlet blood
Of fecund rivers.

In the end there is no time,

No minutes or hours. There is just the rain, And our love.

David Campiche

Tide Pool



Ray Propst

Cold Season Sarcasm

My nose like a flower and the hue of a rose, with dew drops on petals that drip from my nose. It runs like a river across the face of the earth. Make a dam out of tissues, a whole box worth.

My throat like dry leaves on a lawn, getting stepped on and crunching, from dusk until dawn.
Gusty winds blow leaves on the ground, hurricane strength blasts move my tonsils around.

Aches and pains deep as the Grand Canyon, this cold is again my winter companion.

Raven Russell

Under The Apple Tree

As I tumble, tumble, tumble down the hill,
I mumble, mumble, mumble to the bumblebee, next to me.
While I stumble, stumble, stumble on the apples, under the apple tree,
I giddily plop myself down against the trunk of the sweet smelling tree.
As I bite into the big, juicy, red apple,
I think to myself, "How could anyone grumble, grumble, grumble?"

Josie Ricketts

Sunset Theories

"Pain"
The sky has fallen
and
opened a wound
out pours
the rich red blood
filling the clouds
and glowing with pain.

"Good vs. Evil?"
a blazing glare
upon the sky
casting shadows
low, and high
an angel
reaching
out his wings
over the world
great awe he brings

An evil face in places high glaring at all the peace inside A master watching all that grows Not realizing his aura shows.

Caitlin Harris

Singer's Manifesto

Get up early to sing
Go to bed late because of rehearsal
Practice your music
Know your notes
Stand like this
Breathe like that
Nah,
Sing loud in the cold beverage aisle in Safeway
Practice when you want to
Make people look
Own the stage
Act like you meant to sing that flat

Kelsey Mousley

I Had A Dream

I had a dream I danced with the stars. When the sun awoke nothing was left but a rainbow. And now I am alive only when the world is in dream. **Smiles** are all I drink by the light of the moon and the song of the wind. I wiggle my toes and sink deeper. Time dissolves and only clouds go by. The ocean wraps me in shivering warmth and I laugh.

Kristina Kabanuk

The Heron

The stilled waters
of the marsh,
as undisturbed as time alone
in which the heron waits,
as a quiet figure among the rushes
All is so quiet on the marsh...

Silence itself echoes across the waters.

Margit Bowler

Wishful Thinking

i want to be swept off my feet. taken for a walk somewhere in the clouds on a white horse.

i want a white horse. i want to ride

a Harley. fast. very fast. very fast east. far east. to Montana sunrises and Iowa corn.

i want to drive far. fast. in a car. without a leaky manifold or a need for gas.

i want to write my life in #2 pencil. i want to scratch pretty poetry in the margins.

i want to fill in the circles completely. i want to work in the book. i want to write the book.

i want to be someone's. i want to be my own.

sometimes, i want to be the girls who write their married names on notebooks in sparkly pink pens. those girls make me sick. sometimes.

i want moments of clairvoyance.

i want good friends and chardonnay over tinkling china.

i want to laugh like i mean it every minute i'm alive.

Meghan Standridge

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